

AT THE SEA-SIDE.

"Breakfast not over! Whatever have you been about?" Milly Gray uttered these words somewhat reproachfully, as one morning about ten o'clock she entered the room where her friend Caroline Melville was sitting. Her glance had fallen on the dainty china spread out upon a snowy damask table-cloth in the centre, the order and purity of which, as well as the methodical arrangement of the rest of the neat, tasteful furniture, showed the correctness of her surmise.

The lady of the house who was thus addressed, occupies a chair beside the open casement, through which, on a fresh breeze blowing in off the neighboring sea, the sweet scent of flowers was wafted from a garden underneath. The grass-grown street beyond, along which she had from time to time been anxiously looking, was now entirely deserted, all the inhabitants of the fashionable watering place of M— being busily occupied within doors, discussing their coffee, hot rolls, and the difficult problem of how another day's enjoyment was to be obtained. What was most unusual with Caroline Melville, her fingers at that moment were unoccupied, and no book was lying open before her; but her eyes had in them the dreamy, far-off look which showed that, though bodily at rest, she was "revolving a thousand matters in her wandering imagination." In spite of her graceful figure, as she momentarily stood up, she would by most people have been considered plain, though the marks of character in her expression, and in the contour of her finely-arched forehead and eyebrows, were those of a depth and purity which fascinate good men here and there like the hidden sources of some gently flowing and beneficent river. She was not over twenty, but being one of an orphan family, which included an elder brother, Robert, a younger sister, Catherine, and herself, the cares and responsibility of housekeeping had devolved upon her.

"We are waiting for Robert," she pleasantly responded; adding, in reply to the glances of inquiry cast by the intruder into every corner of the apartment, "Kate, has gone up stairs to dress."

"And where is Robert?" asked the pretty, pouting Milly, as if she had a right to know.

"He is gone out for his morning bathe, and will take a walk, I suppose. Come here, Milly, and sit down."

"If he be too late I shall never forgive him!" and the bright, happy girl crossed over briskly to a soft, velvet-cushioned ottoman close by her friend's side. Her robes of white muslin falling in a cloud against the other's dark-gray dressing-gown, contrasted strongly with it, and with the dark shadows of the closely-drawn Venetian blind. "What are you about?" she demanded gayly, and her girlish soprano contracted as strongly with the other's more womanly mezzo-plano.

"I have been expecting Robert for the last hour and more. I cannot settle myself to work."

"Why do you not go and get yourself dressed?"

"It will be soon enough for that when Robert has come in."

"But suppose he be too late? We are to set off in half an hour."

"Then his breakfast will be to make. Besides I don't care about the picnic. This morning I feel rather sad."

"What are you sad about, you melancholy old darling?" and Milly, perching herself actively on her friend's knee, threw one arm round her neck to comfort her.

"Robert is a very dear brother, and we are going to lose him," was the reply, spoken in an almost tearful whisper.

"What do you mean?" asked Milly, looking anxiously up into the other's face.

"You are going to rob us of him, little Milly."

"Is that all?" exclaimed she, reassured, and bursting out into a merry laugh: "Then I rob you of him every day, but he soon comes back again."

"After he is married he will never come back again, to be just the same as he once was. I cannot help feeling a little sorry, and I had such an unpleasant dream about it last night."

"Robert will always be the same. He never changes. I don't believe in dreams one bit. Tell me what it was about."

"Oh, never mind the dream, Milly dear. No doubt I shall soon get accustomed to our new mode of life."

"You must tell me about the dream, or I shall think it is with me that you are vexed."

For one or two thoughtful moments Caroline remained silent, and then asked—"Do you remember the day when we were surrounded by the tide on the rocks opposite Redburn Castle, exactly five summers since?"

The intensely sober look of Milly's face as she nodded slowly in response, showed that the event was vividly recalled.

"And do you recollect how, on running together in our first alarm, we stood for a few minutes at the water's edge, looking anxiously towards the coast?"

Again Milly silently nodded a response.

"In my dream that scene recurred; and the strange, shrinking horror that I afterwards felt whilst wading behind Robert as he bore you and Catherine in his arms above the surface of the waves, came back upon me. Their quick, cold

ripples hurrying relentlessly past, seemed to laugh at us, as if to say we should never escape their grasp. The sight of the sea has been painful to me ever since."

The face of Milly was pressed still closer to her friend's breast as these circumstances were brought to mind.

"But last night," resumed Caroline excitedly, "Robert, instead of laughing and talking to keep our spirits up, as he then did, appeared perplexed and anxious, and when we looked for his assistance he turned himself away. Going to the fisherman's little boat, which was floating further down the beach, he got into it, and immediately it went adrift, so that we were left alone upon the rocks."

"How I detest those little boats!" broke in Milly, impetuously; "Robert shall never go in one."

"At first he seemed to beckon me across; then he lay down in the boat, and as it moved slowly away, it assumed a peculiar shape, and was black like a —"

"Do not mention it," cried Milly, terror-stricken, and holding a tiny, pink-gloved hand over the other's mouth. "How dreadful to have such a dream! What became of the boat?"

"Gradually it disappeared. Attempting to follow after caused me to waken up."

"What a disagreeable dream! I should be unhappy for a month after having such a one. But it is not like getting married to sail away like that. I believe it means something else;" and then Milly, on whose brow sorrow rested only as the bright sunshine on a flower-bed is obscured by the shadow of a passer-by, started to her feet, brushing away the tears which had risen up, and exclaiming, "Whatever is that girl Kate about?"

"Stay a moment," said Caroline, detaining her by throwing one arm round her waist, "I want to claim an elder sister's privilege for once, and give you some advice. You know that ever since our childhood Robert and I have been playmates and confidants, and you will therefore bear with me. After your marriage I shall miss him sadly at the first, and although our new home will be so near, it will be so different for both Catherine and me to live with our aunt. We almost worship him, and have devoted ourselves entirely to his welfare ever since our mother's death. You will not let him feel the difference too much?"

"Caroline, do you imagine?"

"I know you will be good to him; and you must not think that I grudge him to you in the least. On the contrary, I have always persuaded him not to put off the wedding on our account. But in spite of your long engagement, I hardly think even you know how noble and self-sacrificing he really is; and how in the midst of his studies and hard work during the winter months, he neglects his own comforts and enjoyments. The work in his new parish will be harder still, therefore you must do all you can to lighten his responsibilities at home; and although the stipend will be large, the expenses will also be very great, so you will have to keep an exact account of both. You know how punctual in his habits he is, too, and must —"

"Really, Caroline, I don't want such advice as that," interposed Milly at length. "If Robert is such a cross old bachelor, I would rather —" tossing her little head to complete the sentence.

"Robert is not cross, but almost carelessly good-natured. That is why I take parting with him so much to heart. Promise me one thing, that you will be very good to him; which is all I want."

"Well, I do promise that most faithfully. You know I would do anything for Robert." Then they threw their arms round each other's necks and embraced fervently. Notwithstanding the contrast in their characters—or perhaps, rather by reason of that contrast—Caroline Melville and her intended sister, Milly Gray were devotedly attached.

"Now I must go and see what that girl Kate is doing," exclaimed the latter, turning round and moving quickly off to find her own way to the floor above.

The house was two-storied and compact, being built, as well as furnished, more for comfort than appearance. Also, like most sea-side residences, it was full of curious knick-knacks brought home by sailors from all corners of the world, or gathered by scientific enthusiasts as specimens from the neighboring coast.

On the stairs Milly met "that girl Kate," as she had called her, coming down; and arm-in-arm they entered the apartment where the previous conversation had taken place. Both were about an age, though the former was small and fair and the latter rather tall and dark. They were more companionable than Milly and the elder sister Caroline, notwithstanding their occasional tiffs. On the present occasion they were dressed in their gayest and gauziest costumes, trimmed with blue and pink, crimson and purple, as best suited their complexions. The broad sun-hats and lace veils under which their faces were "shown, yet hidden," made it hard to determine which was the prettier of the two.

This day was to be a mad and merry one with them, and on coming together their hilarity knew no bounds. Though there was nothing particular to laugh at, peal after peal of soft, silvery laughter echoed through the room.

"Carry, dear, pray draw up those blinds. One would think it to be a funeral, not a picnic, we are going to." This was spoken by Kate, and duly laughed at by Milly as a famous joke.

The flood of sunshine which poured into the room and over the person of Caroline, when

she rose and complied with this request, seemed to reprove and almost to dissipate the gloom which had overshadowed her thoughts. Beginning partly to yield to the infection of the others' merriment, she said, gayly:

"I shall think Robert has deserted us if he does not soon return."

"What shall we do to punish him for staying out so long?" asked Milly.

"Has Robert not come in?" exclaimed Kate, who, till now, had been too busily engaged in fastening and adjusting a pair of new kid gloves to notice her brother's absence. "We must go and join the party at Mr. Ford's without him, rather than be too late. What do you say, Milly?"

"I shall not stir without Robert."

"Then it appears that I shall have to start off by myself."

"Kate, you must never think of such a thing," remonstrated Caroline. "It would be very unbecoming; and what would William Rayburn say when he came to hear of it?"

"He would put on one of those gloomy looks of righteous indignation which always make me laugh. If it were only to annoy him I would go."

"Would it be a proper or ladylike treatment of him?" urged Caroline, seriously.

"Right or wrong, I am, at any rate, determined to get rid of him. William and I do not agree, nor care for one another in the least. He is one of those quiet plodding sort of men that would just suit you, Caroline. I am inclined to believe that he himself would prefer you if he had his choice."

Caroline felt her face flush, and remained silent on hearing this remark.

"Henry Ford will propose to you to-day if he gets the slightest chance," said Milly, addressing Kate.

"Then I sincerely hope he will," rejoined the latter, averting her face as if this was a subject on which even her feelings could be seriously stirred.

"We can easily manage that," returned Milly, "being the only engaged person in the party, I shall have all the responsibility."

"Oh, you responsible little old lady!" and their silvery laughs burst out.

"Dr. Rayburn would suit Caroline famously," continued Milly, unabashed; "and if you only give up teasing him, he will very soon come round."

"An idea strikes me!" suddenly exclaimed Kate. "The solemn doctor would be company for Caroline to-day. We can easily call for him as we are going past, and take him with us. Mr. Ford told us to be sure and bring a friend."

"Kate, Kate! you must do nothing of the sort!" again remonstrated Caroline, greatly put about by this turn of the conversation.

"Of course we shall not go. Robert will have to call and make some excuse for not inviting him before. He is sure to be at work in his dirty laboratory."

"You have forgotten all about your breakfast, I suppose?" remarked Caroline, as a diversion.

"Really, I feel too much excited just now to eat. There will be a splendid luncheon when we get to Daneleigh House. Pour out a cup of coffee for each of us, Caroline, with plenty of cream in it, so that we may not burn our mouths."

"Not any for me, thank you; I had my breakfast hours ago," said Milly, rising to depart, and adding, "As I did not say good-by, mamma will be wondering where I am."

"Milly, I want to speak to you," said Kate, rising up also, and intercepting her.

"Is it anything particular? Because I want to go across."

"Very particular," and the two girls remained by the window conversing in whispers for a few minutes, whilst Caroline, ringing for the coffee-pot, busied herself at the breakfast-table.

"Has your trousseau arrived?" was the first question asked by Kate.

"No; it will not be home till to-morrow afternoon."

"What is the material of the wedding-dress?"

"White silk, of course, trimmed with point lace and orange-blossoms."

"Where are you and Robert going to spend the honeymoon?"

"That is always a secret, you know, Kate;" and Milly flushed painfully under the keen, half-mischievous glance of her inquisitor.

"But you can tell me, can you not?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not know myself. Robert said only after we were married he would tell me that."

"You and he will have pleasant times. Only I hope my turn will come very soon. It will be dull enough for Carry and me, I can assure you, after you are gone."

"There is a carriage coming up the street," cried Milly, glad of a diversion of any kind from the subject spoken of. "It must be Robert or some of the Fords coming to see what we have been about."

"It seems to be stopping here."

The wheels rattled loudly over the paved street, then suddenly ceased. The bell was rung violently, and the door being opened, a strange voice was heard inquiring: "Has a Mr. Robert Marsden been living here?" "Yes," was the servant girl's reply. Presently there was a shuffling of several feet along the passage, and the room door was thrown wide open. The occupants had crossed over and stood directly op-

posite to it; Caroline in the centre, and the others, in their gay fluery, on each side, wondering what was going to happen next. Caroline advanced a step, and was the first to meet her brother face to face. Four strange men were along with him, pushing him forward and supporting him on either hand. His head was uncovered; his hair and beard matted and clinging about his neck. His clothes were dirty and carelessly thrown on. His face was deadly pale and his eyes stared stonily. He was a corpse.

While bathing that morning he had seized with cramp and drowned before any one could rescue him. All efforts to restore animation after he was taken out had been ineffectual.

The men, in attempting to bring the body in off the narrow passage, had raised it into a nearly upright posture, but when they saw how the room was occupied, they drew back, and carried it to a bed-room up above.

Late that night the coffee cups were standing untasted; the picnic had not come off; and the three girls, one in her gray dressing-gown, and the other two in muslins and sunbonnets, were still clinging to one another, sobbing, moaning, and refusing to be comforted.—M. A. Y., in *Colburn's New Monthly*.

THE AMATEUR BALLAD SINGER.

The amateur ballad singer is, in general, a man of rather more than thirty years of age, short, stout, and rubicund. It is in this state, and after a plentiful supply of tea and muffins, that he advances to the pianoforte to sing of his blighted hopes, his withered joys, his sunken eyes, and pale and melancholy cheek.

Possessed of a most inordinate affection for the murmuring stream, the warbling bird, the sighing breeze, he ever proposes excursions upon the waters, reveries in the shady groves, kisses in the zephyr breeze. Then all at once he cries, "My poor mother! my poor cottage!" and he is in despair, and he withers away; and dies, like the flower of the field, but always with that fresh and rosy face we have before mentioned. Then again, if we are to believe his song, he is but fifteen; he consults the oracle of his love, which replies to him that he will be loved to madness forever. At length the moon rises; he is content, he is happy. Page or damoiseau, he goes forth to sing under the casement of noble dame or gentle maiden; he performs duos with the breeze, with the waters of the lake, with the rustling leaves; with whom or what does he not perform duos? Meanwhile, as sleep is necessary for the tranquil soul, he reposes himself under the shadow of some rose-tree, or under the white wings of some guardian angel, who watches over his repose and smiles upon his waking glance. What a happy life is that of an amateur ballad singer!—a life strewn with flowers and false notes; a happy life indeed for him, but not for others.

In imitation of comic singers and serious singers, of singers of French music and of Italian music, our hero will never sing when asked, but uninvited will "warble his wood-notes wild" by the hour together. Misfortune to you above all, if he accepts after having previously refused! for he will sit himself down to the pianoforte like a Macedonian phoenix arising from its ashes; he will be unfatigable. Then of no avail will be your expostulations, your disapproval, or your applause; you must hear him to the end, you must endure him to the last note of his inexhaustible repertoire.

This puts me in mind of a circumstance which occurred some years ago at the house of Lord——, at the time attached to our embassy at the court of France. One evening he had invited a numerous circle to a supper and a hearing of the celebrated Spanish guitar-player Huerta. As Lord——'s supper parties were always *très recherchés*, and as, besides, the reputation of the famous guitarist had preceded him to Paris, none failed at the rendez-vous, not even Huerta, who however begged it to be clearly understood that not feeling himself "in the vein," it would be utterly impossible for him to gratify the company with an exhibition of his wonderful powers that night.

The entreaties, the prayers even of the guests were of no avail; and the disappointed Amphitryon, after many new supplications had been tried in vain, was at length compelled to order supper, when—O happiness! at the moment when the dishes were on the table, at the moment when the slightest hope would have been madness, Huerta rose and seized the instrument. He played a first, a second, a third piece, each more brilliant than its predecessor; and his *nerve* seeming to augment as he played, his audience began to grow uneasy, for the supper was cooling in proportion as the instrument was warming under the digits of the artist.

Huerta's inspiration, so slow in coming, was still more dilatory in taking its departure; and for upward of two mortal hours did he hold his audience, pale and trembling, not at the chords of his lyre, but at the thoughts of the supper which they too well knew was cooling in the adjoining room.

Mean while, as the terrible Spaniard gave no sign of being soon fatigued, the master of the house, skillfully profiting by a sudden interruption, quick as lightning gave the signal for a thunder of applause. Huerta was moved in more senses than one, and we supped. But the hot supper had, alas! become cold.